

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Wetlands are lands that are either permanently or seasonally wet and that, under normal circumstances, support specially adapted vegetation. They are highly productive lands that perform a variety of functions that are valuable to society. Despite their societal value, drainage and destruction of wetlands were common practice and even encouraged prior to the mid-1970s (Mitsch and Gosselink 1993). Locally, the development of Green Mountain Reservoir in the 1930's, Dillon Reservoir in the early 1960's and Interstate 70 (I-70) in the late 1960's impacted wetland resources in Summit County. Although current regulations are designed to conserve them, wetlands are still filled, drained, and indirectly impacted as a result of both permitted and illegal activities. The combination of historic, current, and future impacts to wetlands results in a cumulative loss of wetland acreage and function. This cumulative loss is especially evident in geographic areas where the rapid pace of development may result in the irreplaceable loss of wetland functions.

Colorado communities have experienced tremendous growth during the 1990s and ongoing development pressures in these areas represent a significant challenge to the conservation of wetlands and a quality of life that many have come to expect in Colorado. Summit County, Colorado is one such area of rapid growth that has experienced a cumulative loss of wetland habitat. In partial response to the rapid pace of development and associated impacts to wetlands, Summit County prepared a Countywide Comprehensive Plan in 1994 that established goals designed to protect wetlands and other important natural resources. More recently (1999) the Board of County Commissioners addressed the cumulative loss of wetlands in Summit County by adopting a *Conceptual Strategy for Enhancing the Management of Wetlands within Summit County*. Moreover, Summit County has been working closely with local and federal agencies and private landowners to stem the cumulative loss of wetland habitat. For example, Summit County is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service to develop a Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) for Summit County. The SAMP was initiated to assess and reduce the cumulative loss of wetland resources in Summit County.

A Summit County wetland functional assessment method was developed that classifies wetlands in accordance with terminology from the Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) approach currently being implemented by a National Interagency Implementation Team through a National Action Plan (Brinson 1993, Federal Register 1996). In 1999, Summit County hired Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to assess the functions of 41 wetlands in the County's four planning basins using this method (Figure 1-1). This report presents the findings of SAIC's wetland functional assessment. In addition, this report includes SAIC's reclassification of previous Summit County wetland mapping in accordance with HGM classification terminology.

This report includes management recommendations and development guidelines intended to assist Summit County in the conservation of wetland resources. For example, the information in this report may be used by Summit County planners to develop or revise Master Plans, enhance or modify the development review process, or to develop regulations for the conservation of wetlands.

This report documents new scientific information about the functionality of 41 wetlands in Summit County. Many more wetlands of similar classification occur in Summit County. However, limited sample sizes and variability between wetlands may not support extrapolation of the results contained in this report to other wetlands that have not been similarly assessed.

Organization of this report includes a brief description of methods (Chapter 2), results and discussion (Chapter 3), and management recommendations (Chapter 4). Appendices for this report include Assessment Area Locations (A), Photographs of Wetland Types (B), copies of Summit County Wetland Assessment Field Data Forms (C); Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG) Water Quality Standards (D); Summit Wetland Assessment Method (E); and Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) Reclassification Table (F).